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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [KISL](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: USCIRF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM DELEGATION
VISITS NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: A delegation from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), accompanied by PolOff, met with Muslim and Christian religious and political leaders, including Kano State Governor Shekarau, on a March 24-27 trip to Kaduna and Kano. Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) leaders in Kaduna say they are "fed up" with what they maintain is systematic political and economic discrimination and are becoming increasingly militant. According to one Catholic leader, however, the older and long-established Catholic church in Kaduna is largely left alone, while the more outspoken and aggressively proselytizing pentecostals and evangelicals are the focus of government discrimination. In Kano, discriminatory zoning practices in relation to churches are a major source of contention; and the absence of proper permits often serves as a justification for the razing of Christian houses of worship. Interlocutors identified lack of interfaith understanding, the issue of indigeneship (whereby those whose ancestors came from a particular state are given advantages over "settlers" from other parts of Nigeria), and the failure of government at all levels to prosecute the instigators of religious disturbances as major problems. End Summary.

12. (SBU) A five person USCIRF delegation met with Muslim and Christian religious and political leaders and groups on a trip from Kaduna and Kano from March 24 to 27. The delegation consisted of Commissioners Leonard Leo and Imam Talal Eid, as well as three senior Commission staffers, Poloff and local PolSpecialist.

TENSIONS IN KADUNA

13. (C) Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) leaders in Kaduna maintained that non-Catholic Christian youth in Kaduna were angry and "fed up", and painted a dire picture of a situation ready to explode. Participants included Rev. Dr. Sam Kujiayat, the Vice Chairman of CAN Kaduna from the Pentecostal Church of Kaduna; Bishop David Thackeray of the Pentecostal Church in Zaria; Rev. David Daggah, Executive Sec of the Bethel Baptist Conference; Saidu Dogo, the

Sec of the Northern States CAN, Reverend John Hyap, Sec of Kaduna CAN, Reverends Yusuf Gizo and Joshua Anywan, all of the Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA) TEKAN (the Hausa acronym for "Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Nigeria"); Sr. Apostle Rafel Adejumo from the Organization of African-Instituted Churches a.k.a. "White Garment Churches. (Note: "White Garment Churches" are newer, home grown ministries with no real ties to European denominations. End Note.) The evangelical and pentecostal leaders present decried what they claimed was widespread institutional discrimination on the part of the Muslim-dominated Kaduna State government in employment and community development projects. (Note: A Catholic representative arrived toward the end of the meeting, and largely kept quiet. End Note.) According to them, the most infuriating manifestation of such discrimination was the denial of permits to rebuild churches which had been destroyed in various spasms of inter-communal violence over the past few years, while mosques destroyed at the same time had been allowed to rebuild. Some CAN leaders expressed doubt to the Commission about whether inter-faith dialogue was even worth continuing, given what they perceived as a lack of sincerity on the part of their Muslim interlocutors, as well as the state government. (COMMENT: While some of their grievances seemed genuine, other assertions by the group came off as a bit conspiratorial and unsubstantiated, including a charge attributed to the Kaduna State Police Command, and trumpeted in the press by CAN Secretary Dogo, that there were training camps for Muslim militants in the vicinity of Zaria. End comment.)

14. (C) In a later meeting, Father Matthew Kukah, Vicar-General of the Catholic Diocese of Kaduna (strictly protect), suggested that the matter of inter-faith relations

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in Kaduna was more nuanced than the CAN folks portrayed or outsiders may presume. Kukah maintained that the Catholic Church in Kaduna, which has been around for a long time and has substantially larger numbers of followers, is largely left to operate without hindrance by the Kaduna state government. He maintained that it was the younger, more fragmented and aggressively proselytizing pentecostal and evangelical groups (who also happen to be more openly critical of Islam), that were really the ones facing discrimination, if not open hostility, from the state government and portions of the Muslim community.

COMPLAINTS OF DISCRIMINATION IN KANO

15. (C) By contrast, the Catholic Bishop of Kano John Niyiring (protect) described the recent destruction of a church which had stood for over 10 years, but was demolished as a result of a zoning violation. The bishop's aide described how parishes are compelled to list the proposed use for new buildings as "library" or "clinic" on zoning applications since a designation as "church" will guarantee automatic rejection. The aide claimed that this practice is in fact encouraged by the state government which then has the power to destroy the structures at will -- even years later -- on the ground that they were not being used as originally claimed. The bishop said, "The Governor will tell you to 'go look and see how many churches we have here'" in an attempt to disprove discrimination. "But ask him how many of these are registered as churches, and not as clinics or libraries." To add insult to potential injury, the form which the Kano State government uses for zoning licenses, a copy of which was provided to Commission staff, contains a statement in Hausa which translates as "These premises may not be used for a church, beer hall or brothel/hotel." The particular Hausa word used, the delegation was told, can mean either brothel or hotel, which the church finds insulting, i.e. to be put on par with a brothel. According to Bishop Niyiring and his aide, the only churches truly registered as houses of worship in Kano are ones which have existed since the British colonial administration.

¶6. (C) Bishop Niyiring also alleged that the Catholic Church has in the past asked for permission to open schools in the hinterlands of Kano state, where no public schools currently exist, only to be denied permission. Bishop Niyiring said he had been asked by representatives of the state government why the Catholic Church would want to open schools in areas where there were few if any Christians or why it would even care about the education of Muslims. He related that the intimation was that it might be dangerous to educate the rural population and thus disturb the status quo. Niyiring claimed that he had been trying to arrange a meeting between himself and Governor Shekarau for over a year without success. (Note: Post contacted aides to the Governor afterwards who had "no recollection" of either the Governor and Bishop meeting, or of any specific requests for such from the bishop. End note.)

NAKED INTOLERANCE

¶7. (C) To paraphrase the views of Nafiu Baba Ahmed, Sec General of the Supreme Council for Shari'a in Nigeria, a private conservative Islamic lobby, as expressed in his meeting with the USCIRF delegation: We (Muslims) are the majority in the North and in Kano State, and we are required by our faith to live under Shari'a. If the Christians don't like it, then too bad. "They are free to move elsewhere," Ahmed opined, in addition to his observation that "obviously the rights of the minority are limited." He maintained that Muslims were similarly put upon in some areas in the south. Besides his "tyranny of the majority" attitude, Ahmed also claimed that the Koran prohibits rule by Christians over Muslims in Muslim majority areas, and noted that this meant a Christian would never be accepted as Governor of a northern state. Ahmed was not shy about expressing his distrust of America and dislike of the American government and its policies, particularly as regards

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to the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

¶8. (C) Kano State Governor Shekarau (protect) started his meeting with the Commission delegation on a conciliatory tone, proclaiming: "Your faith is not complete until you wish for others what you wish for yourself." However, much of the rest of his expostulation broadly echoed Ahmed's more strident views on the limited rights of minority Christians in the North. Shekarau nonetheless tried to defend his record on religious tolerance by noting that he had three Christian members of his Cabinet, including his Special Adviser for Inter-Community Relations. He also noted that the Catholic St. Luke's school was subsidized by the state.

¶9. (C) Both Shekarau and Bishop Niyiring noted that the Kano State Education Law mandates that at least 80 percent of students in every Kano State school must be "indigenes" of Kano State (i.e., persons whose ancestors came from the state). The somewhat perverse result of this statute is that Catholic schools end up with an enrollment of about 70 percent Muslims, since the state government makes it difficult for Christians (most of whom, or whose parents or grandparents, come from other parts of Nigeria) to obtain "indigene" status. The state has built a mosque on the premises of the Catholic school and pays for Islamic teachers there. The extent of state financial support to Christian schools is also in dispute. What is not in dispute is the irony that much of the northern Muslim leadership sends its children to the Catholic schools, as they are viewed as much better than the public educational institutions supported by the state.

SHARI'A AND THE HISBAH

¶10. (C) From meetings with leaders of all faiths in Kaduna and Kano, it emerged that the Muslim Shari'a legal system is a much more contentious issue in Kano than in Kaduna. The

Hisbah ("religious police" who enforce the Muslim Shari'a legal system) leadership in Kaduna State told us that Muslim prohibitions on the selling of alcohol were only enforced in majority Muslim areas, and that alcohol was openly sold in the "Sabon Gari" ("strangers' quarter," i.e. the majority Christian part of town). The Kaduna Hisbah is run by volunteers and is not subsidized by the government, whereas in Kano, the Hisbah enforced the strictures against the selling, transport and public consumption of alcohol universally, including in Christian areas. Kano Hisbah leaders readily admitted that the majority of cases which they pursue involve alcohol and prostitution. USCIRF staff queried why, given all the other pressing societal problems, i.e. poverty, spousal abuse, etc., Hisbah efforts were of such limited scope and focused on punitive measures for alcohol and prostitution, rather than in "lifting people and their communities up" as one of the Hisbah officials had described their mission. The Hisbah leaders replied that "What is important to you may not be important to the community" which they contended wanted legislation on the consumption of alcohol.

¶11. (C) The Commission also met with Law Professor Auwalu Yadudu of Bayero University, former legal adviser to former heads of state Sani Abacha and Abdulsalam Abubakar. As adviser to Abubakar, Yadudu oversaw the drafting of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. The Commissioners asked whether the fact that the Kano State government funded the Hisbah ran afoul of Chapter 1, section 10 of the Constitution which prohibits the establishment of a state religion. Yadudu explained that that clause simply prohibited the adoption of an official state religion, and did not serve to establish a distinct separation of church and state as in the U.S. He characterized Nigeria as multireligious but not secular, pointing out that state governments in both northern and southern Nigeria were involved in and subsidized religious activities, including pilgrimages to Jerusalem for Christians, as well as the hajj to Mecca for Muslims.

COMMON THEMES

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¶12. (C) Common themes from many of our interlocutors in these two states included:

- 1.) the role of discrimination and a lack of intercommunal understanding between Christians and Muslims in increasing tensions, with some interlocutors calling for students to receive a form of instruction on the basic tenets of both faiths (with a difference between how Catholics and other Christian groups are treated in Kano);
- 2.) the problem that the issue of indigeneship poses in these two states, particularly where ethnic lines tend to correspond to religious divides; and
- 3.) the failure of the political leadership to prevent intercommunal conflict, and the absolute lack of accountability and prosecutions afterwards.

On this last point, non-governmental interlocutors of all persuasions were highly critical of the failures by the political leadership to prevent intercommunal conflict (they drew particular attention to the November 2008 intercommunal violence in Jos) as well as the total lack of accountability and prosecutions afterwards. They felt that if the government would aggressively yet even-handedly prosecute all perpetrators of violence regardless of faith or denomination, sectarian violence (or political violence with a sectarian facade) would be greatly diminished.

¶13. (C) COMMENT: Unfortunately, failure on the part of the authorities in Kaduna and Kano to prosecute wrongdoing of all sorts is a hallmark of the Nigerian justice system, and not necessarily limited to inter-religious violence. The Kano State government's reluctance to sanction the opening of new schools in underserved, or totally unserved, areas probably

has a component of distrust to it, i.e. the fear that Catholic institutions might attempt to proselytize. We think, however, there is also something to Catholic Bishop Niyiring's view that it reflects the "keep the servants servile" attitude of the region's political elite, particularly in the relatively educationally underserved areas of the state. The apparent disinterest of either the national or state government in prosecuting those responsible for much of the killing and destruction of property resulting from sectarian violence over the past decade appears to reflect a sense among Nigerian leaders in Kano and Kaduna that, if ignored, problems of intolerance will go away. Our sense is that they will continue to fester. End Comment.

14. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.
SANDERS